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First Prize goes to my family (divided we still stand): Ginny Lynn Sain, Tim Heiple, Drew (my big bro), Saxton, Suzy and Lynn, and Memaw, Pops, Non, Pampaw, and Grandmother.



Special thanks to everyone who profoundly affected my life or just kicked it with me. you know who you are.



Extra props go to none other than \*Nate Powell\*



And a big hip hop hurray and hug to the Massachusetts crew because I'm going to miss the holy hell out of you and the Northeastern time zone and the snow. I hope you guys realize how much you mean to me because words could never begin to explain...



As an introduction to this shabby, cut-and-pasted splice of literature, I would like to acknowledge all the positive forces that acted upon me while writing this, and thus, in return, to reward these forces by dedicating the second issue of Handjive to them. There are quite a few, each important in their own way, and all should be respected as separate parts to an entire microcosmic natural factory, something like the condensation/evaporation cycle that you learn about in fourth grade.

**Dedicated to:** giving a fuck, Katie Batchelder who taught me so much about the hope behind sad eyes, strolling naked in the desert or running wild on the beach at night, (I never thought I'd say this but...) headbanging, using your weak fingers to pry the rusty hinges off your lips letting the plasma and marrow spill through, those lights on the kickball field on summer nights that make everything look fake, realizing that the reason we all hate each other is a glance in the mirror, Massachusetts dialogue under Belchertown stars-- lips encapsulated by platonic gin, crying because there's nothing else you can do, using the sword of truth to split open your guts, hating your life because of love-- all the while loving to hate your life because of...love, admitting yourself as a hot tub junkie, and last but not least, falling in love with the same person over and over everyday for five years straight.



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There's this line in a Silver Jews song that goes, "we were all raised on replicas; what am I singing now, is it part of me? People say it's not, but I think it is, in fact I know I'm real, I know I'm real." Something about those words and something about my mind set lately, it's one of those synchronized coincidences that happens and you remember reading mystical books in 9th grade ordered from 1-900 numbers which explained those occurrences by planet positioning and dead-on elliptical alignments.

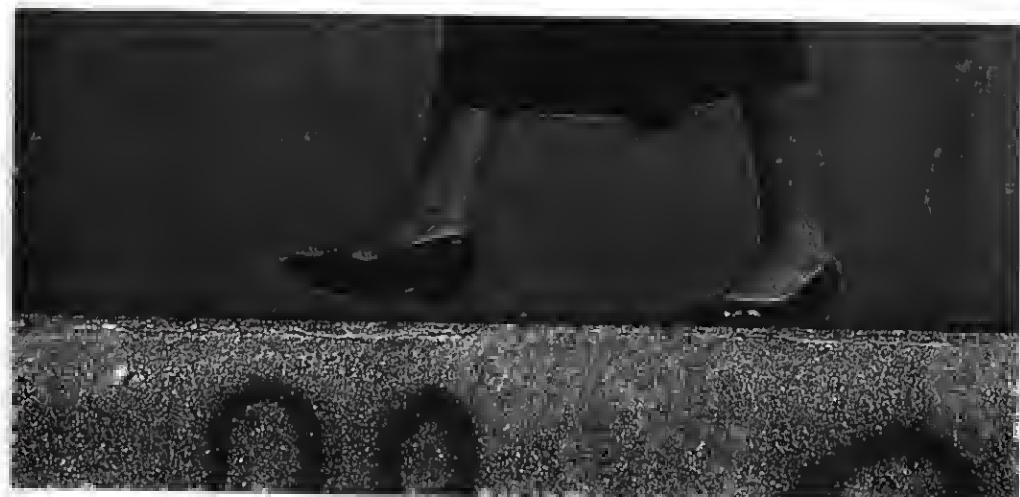
(Sigh) I might be all right then...

But then another hour ticks by and I know I'm not. There's those people who think that when you know what's wrong you're half-way there, but what about when you're trying to figure out what's right, then knowing what's wrong just puts you farther from your destination. Or what if you're trying desperately to pull yourself away from attaining that pot-of-gold, rainbow pipe dream that suffocates us from birth. Lately I've been attempting to understand that Buddhist philosophy where every time you blink your eyes the universe is created and destroyed right before you. All that you know sheds off like shards of glass and you when you try to clean up the mess you only cut yourself and bleed on the carpet.

The other day my friend and I were discussing when must have been the best times to be alive were. I had to say France 1920's, someone else said Russia 1917, I think Middle Earth was mentioned. My friend said he thought that right now was the most amazing time to live, disclaiming the fact that he had no choice, he just really thought now was more exciting than before or over there. At first I rebuked him, thinking about all the shit I'm subjected to and all the dollar bills that are puked up for love and happiness in this country and all the movies that exploit art for luxury's sake, and vice versa. His argument was something that we spent a lot of time discussing this winter, trapped in cars trying to go nowhere with inevitable conversations that sent us to the moon and back. There was so much talk about the past two years and how they've attributed to an utter rebirth in us all. "This time is so exciting," he proclaimed, "every second we get to shed off some layer of rubber skin that seems so ingrained in our consciousness..."

This is what the Silver Jews were talking about and what my mind has been fixated upon for quite some time. I believe that there are three structures ruling history and society, literature, science, law,

worth its weight in boasting words and phonless nights.  
Up the slope we ran, ascending from what we took to be fantasy,  
"could this be real" we thought,  
more so than fingers and lips and movies about dead bodies?  
It was as if the bomb had dropped right then and there  
and left our skeletons on some playground  
shadows caught on walls painted with elementary school murals.  
Was there really one red button that read "fire"  
and one Red man with his finger resting on destiny?  
I stepped through dismal years and right past my childhood  
flashlight beams showed degradation and fear  
my mind searched, like hands on a pitch black wall,  
for the answer to his question, repeated, over and over in my ear,  
voice quivering and hand trembling, "what is this place?"  
It was in those woods that I first thought about science  
devouring nature and manipulating truth,  
false rainbows gleaming colors through lines of gravity.  
North, south, east, west, west is best,  
and sex is wrong  
and people die from the blast or, if that don't get em',  
the radiation melts their smiles into rotten teeth.  
And in the dark tunnels I could read faded red paint,  
someone quoted the Beatles and credited Charles Manson:  
"when you get to the bottom, you go back to the top."



**The Day the Woods Got Small and the  
World Got Big**  
or  
**When I was in Third Grade and the A-Bomb Sat  
Me Down for a Talk**

He tore his shirt on the fence  
incircling innocence and bordering a world  
full of weird old ladies and cutthroat awakenings  
that rang in our ears like tisk-tisk from my lurching grandmother  
with no hip and no heart because they broke long ago.  
I flew past her all the way to Saturday  
with a longing to discover what would soon become  
an image of praxis, of time standing still.  
Looking for a legend, but instead  
stumbling over an age of terror and a regime  
that could have blinked and we'd have never been born,  
but the only death we knew was gold fish and King Arthur.

Armed with garlic and plastic swords,  
we tore into the woods.  
Through heaving breaths from underdeveloped lungs  
we fumbled with the weight in our pockets  
from stale gum and setting suns  
descending below the horizon into Xanadu  
I lost my footing, wet and bleeding,  
thought I knew the tricks of the trade, toughened up and called a tomboy,  
with no notion of consequence  
his hand followed the red stream  
from dirt-caked patella to pure white thigh  
in a fourth grade game of confused hearts  
something in those fingertips made the abyss shake  
and his clear blue eyes, like a fountain, held one drop of water above the rest,  
never falling after after he noticed me, looking at him.  
Just before nature steered our lips to an unlit shore,  
we saw, across the chasm, a concrete edifice  
and a way out of a situation that we couldn't understand.  
Broken loins taking sudden notice of the orange drink stenching our breaths,  
and sticking to our fingers that weren't ready to stick to anything but trouble,  
the red spray paint took form  
as our eyes out ran our heads  
back to purusing a neighborhood conquest,

whatever...that is beauty, power, and truth. Beauty and power are objective--don't try to argue it! Everyone is coaxed into believing and either worshipping or absolutely detesting the way in which society has molded these two entities. Truth is the only thing that lies subjective to each individual. There's so much piss and shit and lies filling up our collective consciousness every day; it's starting to rise above our eyelids, blinding and burning much needed optics, keeping us quiet and removed. Well the time is here to scream because reading between the lines will never get you as far as they say. There's so much for us to discover in ourselves and in other humans and what the fuck good does anything do when you can't talk about it. So every second we must strip off pieces of constructed "clothing," until we are all standing butt naked in the streets and I'm not afraid to hug you, totally disregarding the fear of open-minds and exposed flesh and goosebumps.

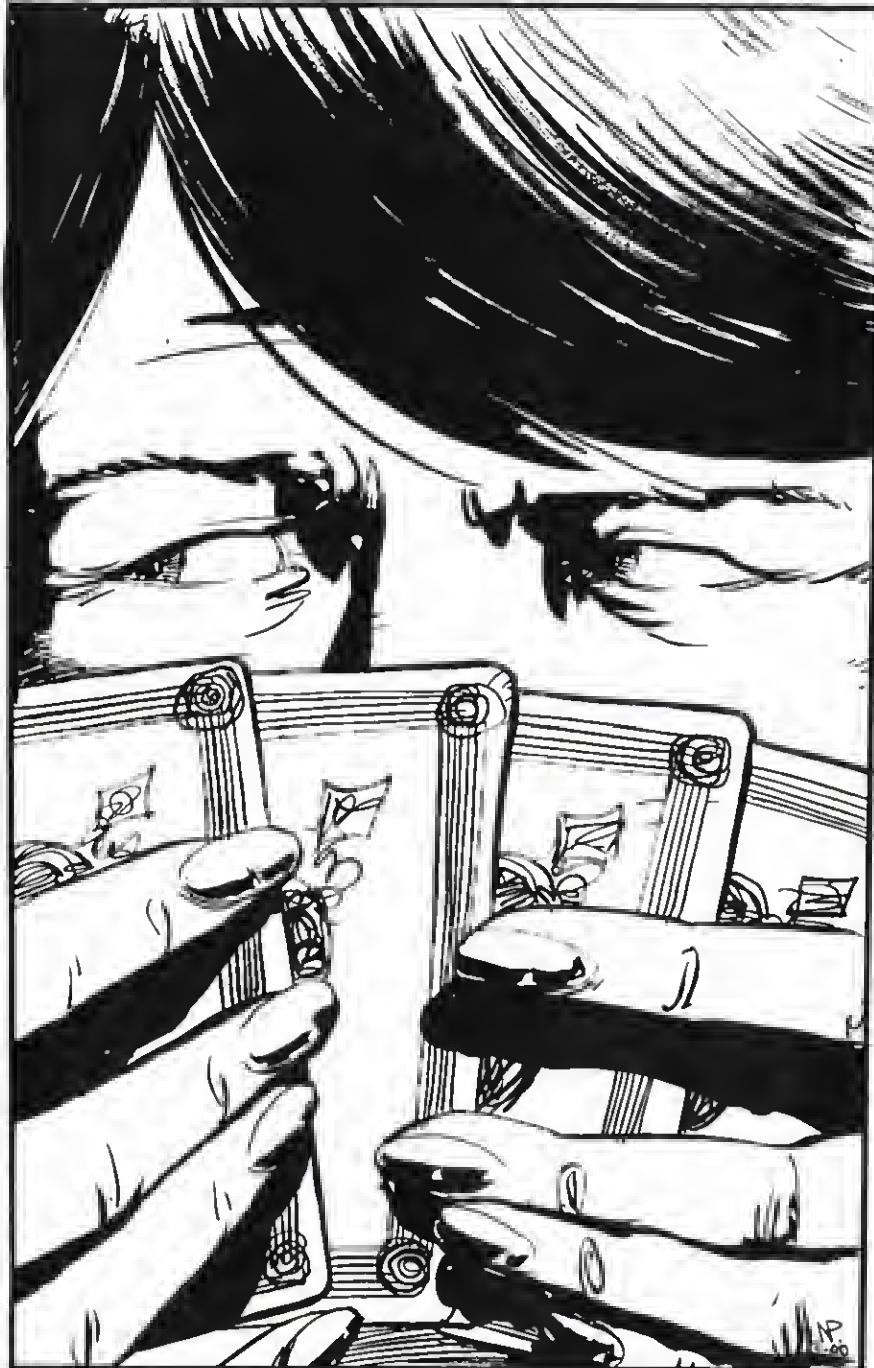
What did Caesar really whisper to his protégé as he fell? Et tu, brute, the official lie is about what you'd expect from them--it says exactly nothing. The moment of assassination is the moment when power and ignorance of power come together, with Death as the validator. When one speaks to another it is not to pass the time with et-tu-Brutes. What passes is a truth so terribly beautiful that history--at best a conspiracy--will never admit it. The truth will be repressed or in years of particular elegance be disguised as something else.

----Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

"I've never trusted a revolutionary who is afraid to dance."

----Phillipe Luciano, *founder of the Young Lords*

\*If you're still reading and you want more on this subject please watch the movie *Magnolia*; it's all about sifting through the bullshit you've been fed all along and standing up for yourself in the face of that demon called the past. It also has one of the most brilliant scenes in any movie I've ever watched. Or if you don't like movies, read Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*.



I dug up all this stuff I'd written during my second grade creative writing course. I wish I were still that good. It's strange to read a child's thoughts, before inhibitions set in. It's really amazing how much more creative one is before guidelines, cultural and grammatical, form. Whenever this topic comes up I always think about the time I was in a restaurant and these kids started throwing themselves across the floor like concrete rollers. Their parents were ton lost in beer and conversation, probably business or the latest syndicated television programs, to notice the unconventional kick these kids were getting out of their stunts. I thought, it's only a matter of time until they get what's coming to them. They were rolling over people's purses and feet, they rolled right in front of a waitress, almost causing a dining disaster, but still, nobody batted an eye. I thought long and hard about joining them, the whole time wondering what was holding me back.

the moon was once made out of cheese.

now it's just mere gray iron.

ironically much less exciting.

when we know, we're lost,  
what we know, we fear.



**The Mask**  
The Mask belongs to Alexter who looks strong, healthy, handsome, like Rambo. He's 20 and happy. He lives in the Bermuda shore, the unknown zone. He was born; he did not know his parents. He was born with a mask on; it covered his whole face. If he takes it off, his face will melt. He comes from 16 galaxies away. It is always dark there. When he dies, he comes back to life. Some people see strange things in the Bermuda; he does the mail.

One day Alexter was in a time capsule going in the Bermuda Triangle. And the time capsule stopped and mixed up all the clocks in the world and nuclear gasses came up the ground. So in 5 minutes it would start destroying the world. So he got his droids. They were not tough enough. So he went for the laser with his bare hands: ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, three, two, one....



Bang zaat  
B A N G!!  
He crushed the laser that the nuclear gasses came out of.  
He saved the world.

When I die, I want to be remembered by these ingenius words I wrote at age seven:  
I used to believe in dinosaurs.  
Now I believe in monsters.

Emily

different stories or reasons for being there and maybe 500 different names like the one Adelaide had given him.

"I think I might have an idea," Sarah Jo said as she took out her pocket knife and started nipping the cloth on the roadside icon's back.

It was odd, she didn't even have to explain herself to Adelaide. Together without a word, they tore out the cotton stuffing that gave the Indian his prowess and replaced it with the corpse of Adelaide's husband, ex-husband rather.

"I swear, I never thought I'd be doing this to Chief Howdy How, never ever. I guess I never pictured doing this to the man I exchanged vows with either. Sometimes life catches you in moments that you can't escape, moments that you don't really want to escape cause even though they feel so fucked up, something about them seems normal and maybe even right, like you're on that right track you always here about or the planets are in correct alignment with the black hole that the universe sprung from...What the hell am I talking about, I'm too tired to make sense right now."

"No," Sarah Jo replied, "you're making perfect sense."



## Exhausting a silicon lung by Emily Heiple

The Bridge game was never what really mattered on Thursday nights. I mean, it was Bridge Club, that was the occasion, but in actuality it was a broken vehicle for a group of upper-middle class woman to get together, discuss and shroud their meaningless lives, drink but never get drunk, talk but never reveal too much. The conversation always came and went through the same route...

"Brain Frappis smokes pot with his father..."

"Julie Ruin got drugged at a party last week and Micheal Jenson had sex...."

"What does his father do?"

"Was it that date rape pill?"

"I think he runs a lawn care business, or something like that..."

"July Ruin asks for it, I swear she's just like her mother..."

The topic was always averted just before anything too bad was said or anyone's feelings got exposed. Then it was another hand of Bridge to clear the slate of emotions and guilt and the hopelessness that goes along with having way too much free time.

On this particular night, Peggy Brown was hosting the bridge game at her house on the corner of Osage and Santa Maria. It was the last Bridge game these ladies would ever play together, but not to worry, there would be other clubs, there always had been. Like I said, for them Bridge was just a catalyst. A deck of cards shuffled between gossip, empty words standing in the way of regret, kids discussed, dissected, and robbed of individuality just as they had been decades before, the comforts were all too evidently oppressive. Most of the ladies closed their eyes between drags of cigarettes, looked away when their husbands did the same. They masked aggression with talks of soap opera scandal and PTA jubilance; it was routine, stifling yet unpleasantly rewarding. It was all there, laid out perfectly, cookie cutter morality with a sign on the dotted line slogan attached. But not Peggy Brown. Everyone called her "Peggy Brown," one name, not two. The Peggy was her first name, the Brown her maiden--it was some kind of old Southern tradition that kind of metamorphisized itself into one long name. One long name that spread itself over one not-so-long lifetime that ended with the beginning of this story.

"Sue Allen, where did you get those shoes?"

"I haven't seen Turner in ages, I don't even know if Cynthia's still going with him?"

"Yes Harrison is away on business for the weekend so pour me a Merlot, please, Nancy."

"Would you believe Dillard's, only 80 bucks."

"Wouldn't you think as her mother you'd pick up on those things?"

"Billie, I believe it's your turn to deal..."

Peggy Brown had spent six hours cleaning the house and preparing for the game tonight. Cooking appetizers wasn't her forte, not like it was for Debbie or Sue Ellen, but her cream cheese tortilla rolls definitely weren't bad, far from it. In fact she'd gotten several compliments, she even gave Becky the recipe. She lied and said that it was an original, gaining sacrificial integrity in hopes that they didn't see the recipe in this month's *Southern Living*.

"Peggy Brown, why are you hounding me to get this game going. Usually ya'll wanna talk talk talk whenever I want to play, so now that I'm dealing I'll be the one to stall."

"Billie," the quivering in her voice went unnoticed, "go ahead and chat..."

Her ears burned and the reverb of embarrassment drowned out her words. Peggy Brown could not believe her eyes, there was a pile of dog shit on the floor in the living room. She could see it in plain view from where she was sitting. "Doctor Megan," she whispered once to herself, then screamed a million times in her own head. DOCTOR MEGAN YOU LITTLE FUCKER. A thousand question ran through her mind. Where was she now? Did it smell? Had anybody noticed it? When was she going to make the appointment with the vet and finally put her to sleep? Doctor Megan was old, nobody knew how old exactly, but she was blind and deaf and losing control of her excretory organs. All the signs were pointing to a much needed execution--for Christ sake an 1,000\$ rug was practically ruined, blatantly there was probable cause.

Peggy Brown knew this, she was beyond guilt, it was just that she kind of liked Doctor Megan. In fact, when she thought hard about it she realized that Doctor Megan was the only person existing in her little suburban world that she could stand to be around. Her husband was nowhere to be found, her daughter wouldn't look her in the eyes anymore, that left a sea of immediate acquaintances and so-called "friends" who's names were nothing more than carpool substitutes and bridge partners. What she liked most about the little fu-fu dog was her name, the one she'd given to her despite a disgruntled family. "Who names a dog Doctor Megan?", they asked. It's not too strange a question, and definitely not as uncanny as the answer.

*Peggy Brown had been wishing on stars since she was three. And since she was seven she dreamed of being a doctor, of course it was kind of out of the question now...Her life as a housewife and her membership with the Bridge Club, the country club golf league, the PTA and other time consuming organizations would never allow her the freedom. Usually things were all right, she could forget about it and have dinner on the table the second her husband walked in the door, enjoying a sense of something that seemed like happiness. But then there was that hour of General Hospital that got the remorse flowing through her veins. Everybody has that dream that somehow gets capsized in the rugged ocean of reality. Besides this longing for a place in the medical field and a ticket out of a pointless life, there was also that name.*

Adelaide. Sarah Jo opened her mouth and on her lips she caught the question that was ominously lingering in the air; "What are you-errr-we going to do with the body?" She scolded herself for that blatant slip of the tongue...

Fuck you Sarah Jo. Why can't you just connect yourself with someone or something? Remove yourself from the removed and stop this self-reflexive destruction.

Adelaide didn't even look at her, she just kept on dragging her husband's body, face down with his arms evenly extended outward, fingers bouncing over cracks and bumps in the concrete, across the lot. Without thinking twice and undoubtedly abolishing the notion, Sarah Jo walked over and picked up the dead man's legs. Adelaide didn't seem like she was going to say anything, ever, at least not until she dropped her side of the load and looked at the sky evacuated by darkness.

"You know that you're an accomplice now, since you're aiding me in this terrible felony. I mean unless you want me to kidnap you or something." It seemed like one of those scripted comments that was somehow planned to be spoken from the beginning of the episode. Next question...never was answered...for lack of any neatly contrived response...

"Ummmm...What are we doing with his body?" Sarah Jo didn't want to think about the past or the future, only what was forming in between the two dead oak trees. Why she was still there? Where they would flee to? Was she still going home after this? Were those police sirens she heard in the background or coyotes on the trail of fresh prey? Luckily Adelaide sensed her fear of extraneous conversation and cut to the chase.

"I was thinking maybe we could just hike out a ways into the desert and dump him there, leave him for the vultures and the coyotes to fight over. But you know there's that smell and the fact that a hell of a lota vultures will be swooping overhead. Might look funny from the road."

"I, um, I don't really think we should be here when the sun comes up and that'll happen in like twenty minutes or so..."

There eyes both started darting across the horizon, around the scene and the props they had been given to work with. Sarah Jo couldn't stop thinking about Jim Thompson novels. And about death and deserts, death in deserts, the desert as a tomb.

"What is that?" Sarah Jo asked, pointing to a stuffed scarecrow-like Indian propped up against the side wall of the vacant service station.

"What, that Indian? We used to call him "Chief Howdy How," back when this place was still pumping gas, years ago. For some reason they left him, I guess people are just used to seeing him wave, so they leave him at peace."

Sarah Jo dropped the man's legs and walked over to the Indian, Chief Howdy How. He was pretty tall and looked just like a real guy, at least his frame seemed life-like enough. She imagined people mistaking him for a real guy, kids on vacations with their parents. Legends were probably based around that friendly life-less victim of manifest destiny, the guy probably had 200

and budweisers, telling her how much easier it is to walk away from her problems, swallow that bullshit with a taste of sugar and gently drift into slumber listening to the tap-tap on the wheel of fortune that never seems to stop on her number before someone else wins the dining room set.

She looked back at Adelaide standing under the faint lights above the deserted gas station. She was dragging his 220 pound body across the gravel with such ease and efficiency. Everything in that surreal moment helped to create a blue screen effect; some sense that all the happenings on this sultry August evening were staged, faked, or merely dreamt.

As Sarah Jo watched the car slow down, stop, hesitate, and continue without her, she sighed and released twice the amount of air that her lungs were holding. The breath was from somewhere deeper; someplace that was able to suffocate that ever present feeling of loneliness with the thought of moonbeams reflecting off a valley she'd never walked in or shining through a dirty pain of glass in a city that she'd never seen. Releasing Co<sub>2</sub> cleared her capillaries; the modules in her brain became unplugged with the thought, "Ahhhh, finally running into something rather than away from it..."

As she made her way back to the gas station something reminded her of the bathroom in her mother's bedroom. Maybe it was the way the lights made her skin glow or maybe it was the way that the utter darkness made one of the fading lights brightest right as it died out. Her mom's bathroom was one of those cocaine mirror set-ups with reflections in all the wrong places. The ones that make you cringe from having to see yourself from all of those obscene angles. Teenage girl self-consciousness reflecting itself 200 times from what seemed like miles away. Sarah Jo used to stand in front of those mirrors until she's start to hit herself with disgusting narcissism. Thinking about what she used to do to herself sent embarrassment and fright down her spine and into her thighs.

The optical recognition brought on a full odorous hallucination of dirty underwear and over-priced shampoo, the strong scent which loomed in her mother's bathroom since she could remember. She used to try to figure that woman out by studying all her meaningless toiletries and the way she kept things perfectly messy, sort of the way she thought she'd uncovered something about Adelaide just by watching the way she was dragging her dead husband face down across the concrete, yet every few steps stopping and placing her hair back behind her ears. Somehow everyone else in the world keeps there messes so neat, while Sarah Jo obsesses over keeping things so tidy that eventually they dissolve.

As she stood there caught in her own web of narcissistic delusionment, that forewarning moment of daylight's approach, which isn't particularly in the form of light, passed over her; the one that happens suddenly and without warning and more often than not when you least expect it. "Could it be that late?" she thought aloud. "Well, the next day has to start somewhere." Instead of trying to figure out where the last one had ended, she walked over to

Megan. You always hear on talk shows and such about people who are trying to cope with being trapped inside the wrong sexual vehicle. People who know that what they see when they take a shower is as foreign to them as a copy of Das Kapital on McCarthy's bed stand. Well Peggy Brown, while not under such extreme circumstances, was not too far from a spot on Jerry Springer. She'd hated her name since the first time she heard it; she still had problems with self-recognition, in her own head it was Megan.

Why did it have to be now, of all times, she thought as a flood of angry tears roared against her eyes like a dam on the brink of collapsing. As the woman jabbered endlessly about nothing, she thought hard. Should she let the accident go unnoticed, the last thing she wanted was for these people to see her on her knees cleaning up doggy doo. The image had way too many undertones and would leave all the women with that same sense of satisfaction that she felt when she heard about a bad act someone else's kid committed.

Shit cleaning up shit; they already thought of her as some lesser organism, a plebeian looming in the ruins of suburban idealism. One of the nouveau riche who like Milton's Eve feels much too crowded and luxurious in her own "garden of Eden." Since the day they were born most of the other women had learned to ignore that apple looming right over head, but not Peggy Brown, she hissed right back at Satan as her mouth watered for a change of scenery. It scared her that all the other women took notice of her tragic flaw, only they didn't see her as the Che Guevera of house hold appliances or the Emma Goldman of car pool pick-ups, her subversive mind set isn't something she heralds-no no-it's a curse in fact. All the women around the table had it better than her because they could ignore their own Doctor Megans. They laughed at Peggy Brown's slight resistance and called her one of those liberated house wives of the post-modem era who have been driven crazy by the same thing that sets them free. Her finical background is also thoroughly discussed, her duplex roots are a common joke when she's not around. Peggy Brown wasn't from "old money," a phrase that should have lost its chickness with the expository decline of Tom on the East Egg, but like most everything these days the truth is still barely breathing between the lines.

All this tension left Peggy Brown paranoid; she wanted to be numb like them! Oh how she tried to block out her urges. At the last game she went on and on, gushing out lies about her husband's most recent bout with the law. He's awaiting trial for his third malpractice-practice suit in three years and with law counseling and gin-a-tonic therapy they haven't seen each other in almost seven months. Every time someone brings it up Peggy Brown breaks out in hives and its not because she cares for him or misses him. If there's anything she's realized over the past year it's that she never loved him. Of course every girl wants to marry a rich anesthesiologist, but who bargains for one with nerves scorched and deadened from gin and repressed lust, knowing the two don't mix well? And all the lies, who are they protecting but herself?

"Will you ladies excuse me?"

"No ma'am we will not, we're in the middle of a hand here," Billie said half-jokingly. Peggy Brown sat there for a second trying not to notice the feces sticking out like one of the black waiters at the Country Club serving tea to a sea of white racist patrons on a Sunday brunch. It was just so out of place, it almost revealed in itself. "Hey! I'm here mother fucker and you'll try and forget it until one day you slip and I shove my ready and willing foot up your ass and take back what's mine." That shit mocked her, it mocked the infrastructure of a mindless Saturday afternoon, and she had to put a stop to it.

"Ladies, I'm sorry," she said slamming down her cards, "but I have never had to tinkle this bad in my life. You'll have to excuse me."

No one said anything, at least not until she was out of the room. Normally she would have perched next to the door to hear what they had to say, but this time she was too worried about the dog's mess to care what was pouring out of their deceitful mouths.

*The irony was so thick you could shape it into holiday patterns and make cookies out of it.*

"Jennifer. Jennifer honey, where are you?" She burst into her daughter's room without knocking.

"MOM!! JESUS, what do--"

"SHHHH...Quiet! Jennifer, honey, I need some help."

"I'm not going near those snotty shrews downstairs, actually, I vowed last night not to ever speak to you again," she said with a new found air of nonchalance. She picked up the magazine she was looking at before her mom barged in and hid her face in it.

"You know what...Ohhh, you will be grounded for this, you little, you little bitch..."

She eyed her mother with awe from behind the magazine. She'd never talked like that before, not directly to her own child. She thought it sometimes but she never said it.

"You've gone crazy mother. Go back downstairs with all the other deranged housewives and talk about pointless crap, it's what you do best."

She wanted to slam the door behind her without allowing their bickering to disturb the game downstairs. She gave her daughter the inherent mother's "go-to-hell, sort of" glare and shut the door lightly. Peggy Brown was on her own--just her and her integrity fighting the powers that be; defending the only thing that really mattered, feeding that queer obsession with trying to seem

She looked up and down the dark highway, shifting road side gravel around with her feet, positioning the particles like pawns on a magnetic chessboard. She tried to think with some notion of the rational, or what she'd been taught about that sort of thing. That anomalous mind set, the age old idea of weighing in the consequences. Well frankly it was getting old and after what she'd witnessed earlier that evening, what ever relevance it once carried had vanished.

Through light years of darkness the stars blinked like a million fiery eyelids, searching the heart of every passer-by. She scanned her line of vision down across the celestial sphere. Parallel to her across the horizon, a pair of headlights were no competition for the desert planetarium. At first Sarah Jo mistook the high beams for the buckle on Orion's belt or a fingertip on one of the Seven Sister's hands. It took her awhile to decipher fluorescence from fire, but once she made the distinction and acknowledged the escape route barreling toward her, she started thinking fast.

If I take this ride out of this flat wasteland where all of this unbelievably horrifying shit just happened will I forget to wonder what might have happened? Will I ever be reminded of the reason we all hate each other on these beautifully star coated nights?

She wasn't afraid of Adelaide, not even after the woman took it upon herself to condemn her husband to hell, delivering him straight to the fiery pit from the driver's seat of his own truck. To tell you the truth it sent chills through her thick body that quickened a constantly sedate pulse and burned her toes. See the thrill of cutthroat awakenings and revengeful deaths and that "rah-rah go violent feminist" element were not at all what excited her. It was just that in the past ten years that was the first proactive, reactionary act of progression that she'd seen or sort of participated in. Someone actually carried out a non-refundable positive act of revenge for the mere reason that we're walking talking beasts and that's what we do. No stifling commercialist idea of democracy would cause Adelaide to choke on her own freedom. She wasn't the middle of the road US citizen with one foot in the misery breeds revolt ideology and the other racing around the office in search of spare change to feed the Red and White soft drink machine- gone- demagogue; of course she was no "activist" either. There are times and places for miniature coup d' etats to occur in everybody's lonely desert flat land, and maybe, just maybe, for Sarah Jo, this was be one of them.

The car slowed down to a crawl, the man inside scanned the roadside for the figure he'd just seen. Sarah Jo started thinking that she had nothing more to contemplate, the decision had been made long ago. A strong voice in her head questioned why fleeing this illegal fucking mayhem was out of the question. The voice was all too familiar, undertones and expletives courtesy of her mother and all her four-eyed, sexually repressed teachers who have no idea where their clitorises' are and will be damned if their going to tell their students about what that feels like, and politicians and movies and cigarette ads and dinner buffets

## **What's Hiding in the High Beams part 2**

(first chapter in Heartattack #22: read it anyway! you didn't miss anything...)

Sarah Jo walked toward the freeway with a familiar static notion in mind that, again, she was going nowhere. Constant transience had become a crutch or better yet a cop out, preventing her from any true human interaction. Traveling had become some existential bumper that kept her moving, but took her nowhere. The possibility of intimacy flushed itself out by way of the erect thumb and the tattered, worn out train schedule (it isn't just frightened rigid ex-children or post-post modernist characters like Slyvie from that novel we all read on the back of our eyelids, yet refuse to understand--it's about time we confess to the primordial sin that's in all of us!)

In the way that it's easier to blink an eye and pretend like you don't recognize someone, Sarah Jo effortlessly tried to make it off that stretch of land where she'd witnessed an act more courageous and stupefying, with cliché beauty as warm and mesmerizing as stories about animals jumping over the moon, than anything she'd ever seen in real life or heard about in fabled tales of gender battles. After Adelaide fired that shot her lips were glazed with moonlight and gunpowder. Those words she spoke were so calm, yet through the shape of her mouth Sarah Jo could sense the woman's fear. Her lips curled like a hook snagging at the gills of revenge, looking as if they should sound like rrrrrrrrr....the buzzing hum reverberating itself like a swarm of locusts, terrifying yet soothing, swarming and chaotic, yet intensely focused.

Sarah Jo didn't listen for Adelaide's urgent holler, she knew that it wouldn't come searching her down. Besides the fact that the highway was pitch black and completely dead, she felt partially responsible for what had happened. Well, part of her did, the other part cringed at how insignificant her presence had been. A shit talking misogynist redneck breaks his wife's nose on the grill of the truck they'd together dreamt about and saved up to buy, then she turns around and blows him away for years of that kind of treatment, for a body slashed deep with scars. How could Sarah Jo have watched the whole thing from the back seat, like a damn victim of some "must see TV" scam--once again her vantage point sums up the pattern of observant passivity that she continuously lays upon herself or rather that she repeatedly stumbles into the middle of and later wallows in self pity over.

Fuck me if I'm going to walk away from a chance to transcend the boundaries of the audience or to break through the metal child-proof gate that my grid indented hands have been so firmly pressed against.

Sarah Jo's thoughts were continuously constructed by some lame attempt at poetics. She often wondered if those thoughts were innate in any way, if they were even her's to begin with. Questions like that seem rhetorical but they always remind her of a story her ex-boyfriend told her about his friend speaking to him in his sleep, muttering, "Am I destroying you?" into his secret sharing ear, her words mirroring his exact thoughts. There's a filter, that when usurped, makes you realize half of the stuff you thought other people said to you was actually from your own mouth all along (like talking to yourself in a dream and remembering).

as pure and normal as humanly possible. Normally Doctor Megan would be on her side, it was kind of strange with her as the enemy.

She snuck around the opposite side of the banister that lead straight into the living room rather than going through the kitchen. This way she would almost definitely not be seen by the women in the den. As she tip-toed across the shag rug floor, the stench from the shit overwhelmed her. Doctor Megan was sick again--oh it smelled like death. Her ears started to burn again, it would be impossible to hide this smell. She could almost see the puke green fumes rising up, creeping through the door way and into the den. She could see the ladies wondering, rather deciding, exactly which one it was that had the shit on their shoes and hating them for it, keeping quiet all the while. Not Billie though, she would point it out and probably assume correctly the dog's role in all of this.

She slid herself along the wall and waited for the apex of the conversation to arise. Then slowly shut the sliding door, sprayed a ton of air freshener and started making her way back along the wall in the dark of the Victorian living room.

"GRRAAaaaqqqAA...ruff.ruff.."

"Ohhh my baby, Doctor Megan what have I done. Where did you come from my little schnokker? Did mommy hurt you?"

She'd trampled across the dog's head, causing it to release that god awful pained squeal. So tragic a noise she'd nearly forgotten about being mad, about the shit, and about the Bridge Game.

"Oh Doctor Megan, how beautiful you are, and what a fine physician. SO sexy and daring and good with your hands." She stroked the dog's back and went on. "I wish I could be you Doctor Megan. Shitting where ever you please, cutting out appendixes, saving young girl's lives. Ahhhh. But no I'm stuck here playing card games with a remote control . I mean I don't hate it...Do I bore you with this talk, day in, day out, jabbering about how unsatisfying life is. I never give you a chance to talk. Even when you're quiet I can hear what you think poochy woochy. Right now you're thinking, "step back in there Peggy B. and reassess whatever it is that you feel has been leached from you because if now isn't the time for revenge through truth than when is?" She laughed at the liberation from just speaking those words. As she walked back into the living room, the c-clamp on her lungs loosened. Those little talks with Doctor Megan always made her feel so much better.

"Peggy Brown..." Billie's voice made her stomach turn. Please don't mention the shit... "That was the longest trip to the bathroom I've ever witnessed. Not to be nosy, I just worry about the pressures of being host. It's not an easy thing, and you weren't really able to handle it last fall. Really I'm just concerned about you." Billie said her part and hid her face in her shadowy hand of cards. It resembled an old eloquent Japanese fan from some eerie folk story; so what did that make her? The sad reality of a fairy tale villain that's just not scary once you've grown up. And Peggy Brown? The resolution that's

never seen or heard of after the archetypal hero runs himself into the ground or blows himself up by swallowing some TNT on an old cartoon.

Peggy Brown didn't say anything except, "I'm fine, really." But in her mind she was taking note of Billie's Achilles heel. For some reason Peggy Brown felt like she had been presented with the upper hand. It was those talks with Doctor Megan that did it. Or maybe it wasn't; regardless the tides were shifting and the flood was seeping under the door. Doctor Megan sensed it and snarfed at the door, Peggy Brown urged herself on with that ubiquitous vote of confidence.

"I'll have her she thought," with a hint of impossibility drawn out by the Zoloft in her nearly focused mind. Trying her hardest to relax, she kicked herself with ease and concentrated on making the rest of the evening work. Had it so far she wondered? It was all up to this hand, even with Bridge far from her thoughts. She let out a load of Carbon dioxide and placed her cards right under her line of vision. The next hand was dealt and with it the gears shifted. This happened sometimes but was always seemed natural. Even these uncalledous women of suburbia felt the thrill of competition that hastened the Sunday NFL boys to ring around some prize that they knew they'd already won. The facade of the almighty and who's doubting anyone in that pristine living room. An ace, queen, two tens, a jack and a two...Peggy Brown peered over her cards, across the table. The room seemed to swell with silence as the women decided on their next move. It was these moments, when everyone in the circle got lost in the game, that felt like procedure and procedure felt right; similar to work and punching the clock-- yet with that there was at least some sense of self achievement at the end of the week.

She kept looking up at Billie who was seated almost directly across the table from her. They sustained an unspoken game of darting eyes, full of awkward moments as one person noticed the other staring, thus returning the glance only to catch the other diverting their eyes as quickly as possible. But for some reason it wasn't intimidating Peggy Brown; she was inviting the lure of Billie's glance so she could hold it in her grip for a few seconds, twitch her legs and gnaw at her fangs like a spider before its prey, then suddenly, breathlessly destroy her. But at that moment Peggy Brown didn't know where things were going to end up, she just wanted to win the Bridge game and get that bitch and all the other lifeless Oprah zombies out of her house--they were starting to rot right before her eyes.

"Peggy Brown!" Billie exclaimed with a "naughty-naughty girl" accusation tone about her. "I wouldn't say this if I wasn't absolutely certain, but you have a real problem tonight with keeping your eyes on your own hand." In the midst of this estranged moment, the entire room caught its breath. This collective action seemed to throw the dynamics and the balance right off center, everyone and everything in that yellow kitchen swayed just enough for Peggy Brown to have to grab on to the table for support. She swallowed hard, knowing that her grave was already being dug. If there was anyone so despicable in the

but fearing you'll never see spring.  
"Who's that for?" she asks,  
curiously desperate  
for a voice other than her own.  
"It's for my mother  
who died long ago  
in another state  
with green cockroaches  
and battleship skeletons,  
at the foot of disability  
hanging on the anchor of a middle-class bliss,  
misty with ignorance and tradition,  
at the bottom or her cardiovascular ocean."  
She took the leaf from his hand  
and stole his grip for her own,  
squeezing so hard  
that his fingers begin to crack  
like popcorn on the sun or locust shells  
under a hopeless farmer's boot.

V

The pain commuted through and through  
singeing across the central nervous system  
dead on, spinal column architectural ruins,  
automatic pontious pilot  
drunk at the wheel  
swerves across an interstate  
into another lane.  
Opposing traffic, oncoming accidents,  
cause the boy to scream her name  
so loud that the birds overhead swoop  
to revel in logistic waves of beauty.  
Suddenly a tear jerks away from the duct  
to trickle down his wind blown face.  
The glistening teardrop reflects all that they'd seen  
in foreign land spelled like h-o-m-e,  
it dangled on his chin  
for the longest second in h-i-s-t-o-r-y  
mirroring and mocking all the time they forgot to count.

I

With the sound of a distant train, he thinks to himself:  
going home

is like a skipping rocks  
across a dried up river bed  
that used to be the swimming hole  
they flocked to in herds  
when the sun gets so blazing  
that it scorched  
the life  
from its children.

He believes  
that staring at it long enough  
will trigger a tear drop  
that could fill the entire ditch  
and pump life into the children once again.

II

kneeling by the river bed  
he tries to remember  
what it is he misses so badly  
but the impossibilities  
futilely rebuke  
that childish smile that curves his eyelids  
and swells the souls around him.  
Contorted images of zombie kid-heroes  
and grandparents trapped in shell-like bodies that crumble  
at the foot of unspoken thoughts  
about times when their loss of words  
was distance hanging over their heads,  
and time eating away their guts.

His escape device  
is a torture chamber  
that taught him to turn and walk away  
but something about the wind  
through that dead tree  
causes lessons to be forgotten  
and hearts to breath fire.

As inanimate objects pulse and sway,  
their motions awaken an impossible moment  
that sustains a lullaby, Twenty-three years in the making.

The bough breaks and a girl falls  
from an old cradle that looks like tortoise shell  
all white and dead,  
scented like sweaty palms  
and salad dressing.  
His eyes twitch,  
for something behind them  
refuses to remember her,

yet they watch fingertips tingle and shake  
with the thought of such innate touches.  
Their lips fumble through gray noise  
as each fears that the other  
is afraid of what might be said  
when someone forgets themselves.

She rambles on,  
letting her brain spill out,  
uncomfortably forcing away  
that plague called the nothing to say  
as he stares hard at the dusty river bed  
still trying to summon  
the tear that could save their lives.

III

somewhere between two islands  
a canal carries water  
that carries lives  
into a century beyond our control.  
institutions crushed by minds  
that regenerate into spaceships  
and capture Prometheus  
bound to a crime he never committed.  
With a microchip we turn on the summer  
and with static noise we gauge out our eyes.  
She turns to the boy  
looking for ear drums to beat:  
“somewhere people are breaking their fingers  
and punching their hearts to keep secrets  
and hide their souls from the natural forces  
that make the piss and shit and lies  
cower in the shadow  
of what’s really behind tear drops  
that probably amount to an ocean  
in the mind of some little ant  
that scatters in fear  
away from the real meaning  
behind the guitars that crash and implode  
a hammer-like bone against untouched flesh.”

IV.

IV

a flock of gray birds swarm overhead  
in a migration pattern  
like that of a broken finger.  
A sudden gust of wind  
is born in the void  
of a leafless crooked tree carcass  
nestling by the bed of the river.  
The boy made of bones  
holds a red leaf in his hands  
feeling, like in Frost, the pain  
and invisibility of surviving a winter,

eyes of the Bridge club, it was a cheater. The kiniving types who try to find some way around the constricting rules that have been set for them. The ones who resist the regulations that are put in place and carried out with a blatant and utter disregard for those who are expected to follow them. Peggy Brown wasn't cheating, she didn't look at Fernie's hand; she kind of wished that she would have because at about that time, just before the bullshit started seeping out of Billie's mouth she was thinking about how much she hated this club and this game and this town and her life. It was a lot to carry and despise in one thought, but it was real. Finally something real, she thought as a smile crossed her face.

Billie and the others where need less to say in awe of Peggy Brown's actions-cheating and smirking about it?! The gossip was already starting to drip off their tongues. Peggy Brown's smile got so big and powerful that it reversed itself into a frown. Her face changed seven different colors and rested at a bright bluish-pink, some color resembling the flame from a gas stove. She had never felt more anger for anyone in her life than she felt for Billie at that moment. And suddenly it all came to her, like a dream seventeen minutes after awake. ONE, TWO, THREE--BAM, BAM, BAM--a chain of actions spread themselves out in front of her eyes. It was shit she'd been thinking about for years, yet couldn't remember over the loud hum of her regular old life. The realization was of total disgust for Billie, for her marriage, for her 1,000\$ dollar rug, for Pat Sajack, for instant mashed potatoes, for pointless card games and the ones who always drew trumps from them, and most of all for herself. In this instant a piece of her mind succeeded from years of conditioning, exploding with false recollection and troubled sensory, just keeping it all quiet was next to impossible.

She got up from her seat, put her cards down and tried to think what Doctor Megan would do in this situation. She'd seen the vision and knew the extremities which it involved, but if she wanted it to work she had to be cool.

“Billie, I’m sorry if you think of me as a dishonest person, and Fernie, I want you to know that I wasn’t deliberately trying to cheat off of you. She obviously mistook my wandering eyes for tools of dishonesty. This night hasn’t gone exactly smooth, but I hope I can mend everything with a little coffee cake and some white Russians. Now if you’ll excuse me I’m going to prepare dessert.”

Peggy Brown got up from her seat and walked into the kitchen, still in some state of shock. Doctor Megan was waiting there for her, she’d heard the whole thing. The dog started licking her ankle and her heel over the brown Sears pantyhose that stuck to the small bits of stubble on her frail ankles.

“Oh Doctor Megan, this is it for us. Will we ever make it out of her alive?...I’ve always wanted to say that!”

Behind the mirror in the bathroom there was a medicine cabinet the size of an airplane storage bin, Peggy Brown spent a lot of time peering into that gap in the wall. She has everything in there, a regular Fear and Loathing in Suburbia type of operation. Something for the whole family: prozac and zoloft for everyone, extra for her of course (being a housewife is a stress-full operation,

and quite boring at times), riddlin, aderal, and percocet for her daughter, before a big weekend night a few lines of that prescription speed went well with a bottle of whiskey (and she was encouraged to pop a couple before a test!), and finally for her husband a little hydro-codine did that back pain well and he didn't even have to feel his wife's legs touch him as they drifted off to dream land at night.

For this occasion she had a special type of morphine that her son was on after his car wreck last July. He was having terrible head aches, somehow a busted blood vessel in his brain had gone undiscovered. Instead of surgery that possibly would have saved his life, his M.D. uncle gave him this liquid morphine to take away the headaches. It definitely did that, and turned him into a vegetable. Just before he was supposed to return to the hospital for another check up, Peggy Brown found his dead body tucked under the covers as if he were sleeping. It was the aneurysm and the black hole drugs that took his life.

Peggy Brown made up a special white russian-ingrediants: vodka, kaluha, milk, six droplets of liquid morphine (brown, so as to mix with the kaluha), four tablets of zoloft, six percocets, and three hydro-codeine pills. She had never done this before or even thought about the extremities of having all these drugs in the house. She didn't know how much she needed to put someone to rest for good, so she made the concoction fully-loaded. Then she stirred it with a thermometer that was lying in the cabinet and headed upstairs. In her room she threw a few of her belongings together: some necessary toiletries, warm clothes, some road maps she'd been sifting through in her spare time, and a hair drier. Tossing everything into her largest piece of luggage, she was ready to go. As she made her way down the stairs she started thinking about her daughter. Would she ever see her again? God, was this worth it if she couldn't. That girl meant so much to her, yet Peggy Brown knew that she had done more than her fair share of shitting parenting. It all came back to this place and how trapped she felt; she'd never been happy here, and her attitude reflected it.

"I'm sure she hates me," she thought aloud, "but it's one of those kind of cycles, treacherous cycles, is that what they're called? I'm mean to her because I'm so goddamn frustrated and depressed and she pushes herself farther away from me and this life and we get nowhere."

There was so much she wanted to say to her, but so little time. She walked upstairs and opened the door to her room.

"Mother," she screamed, "why can't you knock, that's all I ask of you! It's so disrespectful I'm not a fuc--I'm not a little kid any more!"

Peggy Brown just stood there with her suitcase and the white Russian in hand staring in her daughter's eyes--one was blue and one was green--she'd gotten that from her father. She smiled and remembered that she never really thought about what she was going to say to her.

"Ummm, mom...what's the suitcase for?"

"Oh, honey, that's what I wanted to tell you. Actually I wanted to say a few things, do you mind?"

"Whatever, you can talk, I'll sit here and pretend like I'm listening."

statement carries. She wails at the top of her lungs like a little girl, singing old Vietnamese folk songs about a girl named Kieu. Kieu is the ultimate heroine, she symbolizes the strength of the riceland; her myth is very popular around Southeast Asia. Han is one of those people who has such a contagious, almost annoying yet mostly beautiful laugh that fills up the entire kitchen--and she laughs at everything. She's young, well under thirty, yet the bags under her eyes weigh heavy below her feathery bangs and protrude outward against her high cheekbones.

Elsa is from Mexico; she talks to me more than anyone. She's probably the funniest person I've ever met and she knows it. Damn, she laughs at everything she says, I've only seen her act really serious once and that was during the conversation I spoke of earlier with Raza about how shitty the US really is, Elsa thoroughly agreed and miraculously kept a straight face the entire time. One day one of the ladies was talking about how her granddaughter had a gland problem and couldn't lose any weight to save her life, I don't think Elsa really understood what she was saying, but hell, she was laughing up a storm anyway.

The best conversation we ever had was about The Blair Witch Project. She asked me if I'd seen it and told me that it was the funniest movie she'd ever seen. Now I know there's a definite debate on the caliber of fright that movie evokes, but I've never heard of anyone who found it as funny as Elsa did.

Elsa rallied everyone together by asking, "Have you seen The Witch Blair?" The whole crew stood around as Elsa laughed, most of them with the same confused expression as I, wondering what the hell was so funny about that damn movie. Finally Elsa says, "Oh the one scary part was the snake," she's still laughing of course, "and the girl says I see sticks, but there's the snake! Ahhh, the snake!" Then they all started talking about the snake that was so clearly the nemesis--what the hell, I thought. I tried to figure out where the snake was and how they'd seen it and I hadn't, but no one wanted to listen to me. Finally Elsa heard my pleas for a faint grasp on their keen insight. I told her that I hadn't seen any snake and that the movie scared the shit out of me. I don't think she understood me but she laughed her ass off anyway.

shabby, she painted red letters across the side of the outside wall that read, "I have the right to live amongst chipped paint!" She has three kids, her husband drank himself to death ten years ago and she's lived alone ever since. I just assumed, I guess, that Melanie did a lot of drugs in her time. Maybe it is the "creative, 'unearthly' minds must have been tampered with" way we judge everyone in this level-headed society, or just the post-oral surgery look in her eyes. Recently we were talking about a class that I had taken with her daughter called *Brave New Worlds*. She read all the books for the class so I started telling her about how the professor is a major player against the war on drugs in this country and how he is a drug theorist, coined as the next Aldous Huxley. Her response was so far from what I expected; she said something like, "Well, if they just hung around me for a week they wouldn't need all those drugs to expand their minds." I was so astonished, I thought for sure that part of her consciousness was stuck in some acid throwback from 1968. I questioned her about it and she claims that she never needed hard drugs, that she's already weird enough.

There's also about seven women, who even though they can barely speak English, find it necessary to spill their guts to me. Because they have such trouble communicating with the others, through no actions of my own, they have decided that I am able to understand and overcome the language barrier. In some weird way, I guess I am. First is Raza from Bosnia who tells me over and over, "I leave my country for war, I come here for peace, but all is is Chick-a !" For some reason her and this woman Chick have a rivalry although they can hardly speak to one another. All Raza talks to me about it how mean Chick is, and, actually, I agree. So in some totally neologistic language we talk shit about Chick together. Raza saw her mother and her husband crushed by a building during the war against the Serbs. One afternoon I sat down and ate lunch with her, she started telling me about how she felt this country was full of bullshit and that the advertisement of freedom she'd come to find out was just a huge lie. She talked about living in Libya, in the middle of the "war" and how she had so much more there than she had here-- free time and material goods and reasons to keep on going. She told me that when she returned to Bosnia after America and the UN decided to set up camp there and become permanent baby-sitters, the place completely changed. With disgust on her face she told me about the McDonald's and the Coke ads and, especially, about all the drugs that had somehow found their way into the hands of the Bosnian underclass. She said, "Working here is like ten-times hell from that place. I would do anything to go back."

Another woman who disregards the inability to converse is Han. She is from Cambodia and her best friend is this old Vietnamese man who also works there. His name is Hung but only everyone calls him Daddy. He really is the only thing she's got to a father; she told me once that her real dad stayed back in Cambodia because he was still locked up as a POW or something. I couldn't configure the details or pick up the facts between the broken words, but I could tell that it was something tragic. Han is a mad woman in all the glory that

"Ok, well, first I'm going away from here for good, for a long while. I have the Volvo, I'll leave the Passport for you. I want you to come with me, but see I know you won't now because I've been so nasty to you, treated you like a piece of trash. I never wanted a relationship like this with my daughter, in fact, I never really wanted any of this, it just came to me and swallowed me whole. I'm sure I sound like a nut, but I figure this is my breaking point and if you haven't noticed I'm a hell of a lot calmer than I was yesterday."

Her daughter looked up without a hint of agreement in her eyes, as Peggy Brown continued with her soliloquy.

"See I'm not like this and actually you're the one who continues to remind me of that. You always hear the media cutting down your generation but the truth is, although things are nowhere near perfect or even good, the bad-mouthing comes from a deep amount of jealousy and remorse we have for the speck of humanity you still possess and the efforts you all put out to hold truth and beauty above the wake of all the bullshit we pump into you. Well, I think the world I grew up with and inadvertently built is coming to some sort of end, which is a good thing..."

Silence suffocated the room, yet some sense of relief rebuked their cramped lungs, allowing them to breath. Peggy Brown didn't want to stop talking.

"So when I leave I want to go somewhere far, but honey, I want to see you again, errr, all the time, whenever, not like now. I realize that you probably don't feel the same right now and maybe that makes me feel better knowing that you might want me to leave. As for your father, he'll only pretend to care that I'm gone, but it really doesn't hurt me, the sad thing is it never has. He's supposed to be home on Tuesday night, I think that he'll understand what I've done and try to help you out."

Finally she realized that she was rambling on and on and that her daughter was staring past her, at the open door. She couldn't tell if it was anger or not; she decided to let the silence settle their recently usurped mind sets. Peggy Brown took a seat on her daughter's bed, pushing over the Xeroxed mini-sized book she'd been reading and a few records that were scattered around. It was the first time that she'd sat down in that room in over a year. She sat there for the longest five minutes of her life and without a word between them she finally decided to get up and leave. There was still the business with Billie and the other ladies.

The decision of who to feed that super white Russian to was an easy one. She contemplated downing it herself and then decided that the ending would be too predictable, then she thought about Doctor Megan, but that would be another apathetic escape from what she may have gotten some sort of grasp on in the past hour. Finally there was the possibility of her daughter, but that was a fleeting one as well. The only positive outcome of that would be the fact that she wouldn't have to worry about leaving the poor girl, but the truth is that Peggy Brown loved her daughter way too much for that, plus something had

been telling her since she was carrying the child that there was a lot of potential running through the umbilical cord. So then it was final, with a smile on her face she put down the suitcase and walked into the living room. She brought in a whole tray of regular white Russians, placing the special one on the side.

"Here you go ladies, drinks are served. I'm going to get the coffee in a moment, it's chilling a little bit longer." She couldn't take her eyes off the glass in front of Billie, they kept trying to slip away so as not to make things too obvious, but never the less came creeping back to the conflict at hand. Peggy Brown's mouth was moving, talking bullshit with the other ladies. She swore that once Billie took that first sip she'd walk out that door and vow never to have another small, pointless life filled with small, pointless discussions and extraordinary activities blocking up her empty time. Just as she decided that Billie probably wasn't thirsty, she surprisingly tilted the back the glass and halfemptied it.

"I'll go get dessert, be right back."

She took one last look at the Bridge club and quickened her pace. Just as she left the room she noticed Billie speaking quietly but loud enough to be heard by all, "something smells like dog poo..." Peggy Brown could hear the smirk on her face, her heart skipped a beat as she realized that no one had to suffer any longer from that woman's bitter words.

In one swift motion she grabbed the car keys, Doctor Megan, and her suitcase; she wasn't going anywhere without the dog. She opened the garage and started thinking long and hard about New York City. Logically it was the place she had to go if she wanted to lay low for a while, and what a change of scenery. She knew that her daughter would love to come and visit, maybe even attend Columbia or NYU. She drove on into the night, heading north and drifting away from the place she'd called home for over 35 years. What a relief all this was! But where was the fear she'd been anticipating?

Peggy Brown wasn't bored driving that night; she had too much to think about. She thought about all the things she and her husband never said to each other, all the extraneous conversations that dabbled around the truth. She thought about why there were so many women trapped in constricting social positions and why they were forced to become obsessed with all that amounts to nothing, filling their spare time with blobs of silicon padded activity and suburban housewife rain dances in the middle of a dry season. As a light rain begin to drizzle, spotting her windshield and blurring her vision women become housewives, take on careers, bear the burden of delivering life while simultaneously having it drained from them by a society that spoils the pussy and spares the cock. Child bearer, cross bearer-- who said it was easy bringing life into such a rotten place? Cooking dinner the minute you step in the house from work (whether it pays or not...), the food tastes like bits of fingernails and Secret because it's strong enough for a man and balanced for a women. Does that make sense? Is there anything balanced about being a woman? They say no and give excuses, we say yes, and know everything else is crooked. But then there's

when ever the buns run out or whenever the fries are low doesn't give them half the joy that their smiling faces and youthful attitudes give me. A lot of these women are foreigners from all across the globe, many are widows, and several are the sole bread winners because their husbands lost their jobs when the Massachusetts textile mills closed down; they aren't given any advantages in life yet they work around and serve some of the most privileged people in the country--rich college students. So I feel that it is my duty to tell the story behind some of these ladies and how they continue to kick ass despite all the numerous disadvantages built up against them.

First there's Melanie. Before I started working there my friends and I called her "the lithium lady." While we were eating she would float around the dining room, softly speaking to her self, acting as if she'd just huffed an entire tank of volatile chemicals. Not until I started working did I realize how amazing she is. One day while I was doing the crossword she came up behind me. Actually I could see her out of the corner of my eye; she had a potato in one hand with aluminum foil coming off the top in the shape of antennae, and the same configuration on the top of her head. She crept up directly behind me and said "Bohr, Neils Bohr. He supposedly came up with the idea for the A-bomb before Hindenburg. Number seven across." Thanks, I mumbled. I'd always wanted to talk to Melanie but I never knew how to approach her, she was way too weird. I knew that if I wanted to make friends I had to act immediately. I asked the most glaringly obvious question.

"What's the aluminum foil for?"

"I'm glad you asked," she responded, "most people don't care anymore. But since you do I'm going to let you in on a little secret; this aluminum foil is the way in which aliens contact humans, so I figure that this potato and I, which I have so gratefully befriended will be abducted tonight—if we're lucky."

I didn't really know how to respond, but somehow I did and that was that. Now Melanie comes to me with all her revelations and predictions. We talk about our deep mutual respect for Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon. After a while I penetrated her space cadet façade and found out that there is an imaginative genius under that hair net. She's got this ability to displace herself from her boring job and her tragic life through some fairy tale that deports her into her own world. I fell privileged because she allowed me in with her. I've gained all this knowledge, for example, how would I have known that falafel aren't vegetarian at all, actually they're small marsupials found mostly in the deserts of the Middle East that live in side pitas, and that hard shell tacos are not safe for the omnivorous either, they are creatures closely related to the armadillo. The other day I ran in to her in the kitchen, she'd been working on the deli out in the dining room all afternoon; she was wearing a sticker on which she'd written, "Hello my name is the Deli Llama." I asked her about it and she said that she'd gotten the job because they found out that she was a lamed, stepchild reincarnate of the actual Dali Llama.

Besides being a genius and a grown-up child, this woman is hard-core as fuck. When her neighbors asked her to paint her house because it looked so

## **Liberty! Equality! Hair Nets!**

When I'm at work, punching the clock to keep the wealth flowing, or trickling rather, I sink into an altered state of being. One that is not quite recognizable to the world I know outside of my crappy occupational positioning; one that contains a lot of staring at the ground, huddling in the corner, and retreating for smoke breaks with no urge for nicotine in the blood. We all know work mode, some of us more than others. As for me, I've never had a job that I've really enjoyed or kept longer than two months for that matter. This is probably why I have such aggression and pure hate toward many of the menial tasks I've been paid to perform, that is until recently.

For four semesters running I have been employed as a Food Runner at Franklin Dining Hall at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. While I do take breaks during the summer and winter months, my job has become an intricate part of my persona. I didn't want it to mind you, it wasn't in the cards. For the first year I played my usual part, huddled in my dumb-waiter-window-hub waiting for those thirty pound dishes of sloppy joe to come up from the kitchen so I could perform my task, acting as a catalyst between the cooks down below and the hungry college kids above. I came to work, stole my share of bagels, did the crossword puzzle, and kept to myself; that is until this past semester when suddenly I found myself inadvertently acting accustomed to my surroundings, or rather I realized my pivotal role in the grinding machine. There I was an apparition for months and months, rarely speaking or being spoken to, except for the occasional, "sweetie, we need some more fries on 4B," completely blind to my potential as a full-blown cafeteria lady.

I don't know how it happened, I guess I just eased myself into it. When I returned for the third semester no one knew what to think. You see the cafeteria, or rather the Dining Commons in New England delusions of etiquette jargon, is made up of students and full-time adult employees who are mostly women fifty and over. The ratio of student to full-timer is maybe 6 to 1 in favor of the true cafeteria ladies. And the thing is no student really enjoys what they do there, expect for me. Maybe it's because no one tells me what to wear or maybe because I get free food or simply because they seem to really need me there, I don't know. Coming back for a fourth semester though, that's unheard of.

Yes, many times when people have asked me where I work I balk at the question. I've gotten so used to the response, people think it's a disgusting job so I guess one reason that I'm writing this diatribe is to come out of the closet. HELL YES!! I like running fifty pounds of macaroni and cheese out to a bunch of rich Phish fans, I enjoy scooping endless amounts of mashed potatoes out of buckets and getting the left over residue caked on my sleeve, and most of all I enjoy all the ladies who I have befriended and who have found some solace in my presence at the work place and in their lives. The truth is me being there

always PMS and PMDS and pap smears and men-o-pause; there's no balance anywhere and with nature, mother oh mother, comes a plague called the Y-chromosome. Even those birthing hips are a fashion no-no...

The gaslight on the dashboard glared red against the black night. Luckily there was a Phillips 66 at the next exit. She pulled off the road realizing that for the first time in years she had no idea what time it was. The rain was coming down harder as she stepped out of her car and penetrated her vehicle with the gas nozzle. A strange taste touched her upper lip; without looking in the mirror she knew that it was mascara running down her cheekbones with the raindrops. Peggy Brown didn't care what her makeup looked like, it wasn't important now. She grabbed her money and brought Doctor Megan out of the car for some fresh air. With the dog cradled under her arm, she walked into the 24-hour mini-mart stuck in the middle of nowhere at some god awful hour in the early morning on the first night of her new life.

"Nice dog lady, what's his name?"

"Well actually sir, it's a she, and her name is Peggy Brown."

"Oh, Peggy Brown, that ain't no dog's name. I supposed your name is Buster or maybe Spot," he said with a smoker's chuckle.

"You're wrong again, imagine that. My name is Doctor Megan and I'd like you to hand me a pack of Lucky Strikes in a box and my change so I can get back on the road."

"Doctor, huh? Has anybody ever told you what a pretty name Megan is..."

## Self-Reflection Scars the Exoskeleton

I don't know if you've ever seen The Legend of Billie Jean, damn.... What a cheese-ridden yet completely powerful flick. I saw it when I was a young'un and I just remember the chick shaving her head and becoming free or something, anyway, it's doper than I remembered. If you've never seen it and you consider yourself any kind of a "punk rocker" then your sorely mistaken. No young hooligan with half a wit can afford to go without seeing this filin. It's a completely disenfranchised anthem for the people. For the kids. And their ain't nothin' better than that. Plus the theme song Pat Benetar does is a masterpiece. Rock and Roll.

### SOME OF PATS BITCHIN LYRICS:

"We can't afford to be innocent,  
stand up and face the enemy,

IT'S A DO OR DIE SITUATION—WE WILL BE INVINCIBLE!"

'we can't ~~afford~~ afford to be  
innocent,  
stand up and face the enemy..!'

"Wearing hats to school  
is groovy. It's a change in  
today's society. I don't  
understand why it upsets  
some teachers for us to  
wear them to classes. I  
guess the young is strong  
and the old is weak. They  
don't like to see any  
changes."

RALPH ALLEN



HATS

The order of human speech  
sickens me in a time of endings  
when I can't decipher or understand  
why I can't say what I believe  
when the odds are against me.  
But I hate who I am  
when the light fades over my eyes  
as a car passes in the night.  
It's not hard to see  
that these words are all a facade  
built up against the notion of ever being alone,  
when i'm pressed with the idea of sticking to myself  
I become a parasite on someone else's view of who I am.  
Talk like static filtering through the screen  
voices of species with whom I deny myself the contradiction  
and the formulation equaling mediocrity helps me to think nothing,  
therefore I become everything I scribble,  
and keep writing for some sense of production  
but it kills me, word for word,  
insides stay sheltered outsides freeze up.  
I need to explode from my fingertips  
and stop worrying about the Turn of Events,  
not the present, past, or future--  
Fuck relativity, fuck being productive,  
wondering who it is you work for,  
hating your biggest critic-- that's yourself,  
I can't even speak out loud  
without the voice of reason lashing tongues at my false heart,  
I eat my pride, and that's gluttonous,  
I envy the ones that drift, and that's laziness.